



Tip Sheet1: Professional Development and Resource Series

This tip sheet was developed as part of the Reaching Out: Quality Hospice and Palliative Care for Rural and Homeless Veterans grant, made possible through a contract with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

CREATING GOOD COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TO SERVE VETERANS

Involvement Your Community

- Be inclusive! Invite all organizations who share this work to join the partnership: you are looking for champions in all areas.
- Involve the State Hospice Organization, Hospice-Veterans Partnership and Veterans Service Organizations whenever possible.
- Create a steering committee for your project. Use these members as ambassadors to invite other partners to the table.
- Create an identity for the partnership (brochure, logo, name of partnership).
- Enlist organizations who serve the homeless and rural Veterans, and invite them to become key partners.

Communicate

- Establish relationships with at least one contact from each partner organization.
- Establish on-going and regular communication with all partners.
- Schedule appropriate meeting times and venues. Location is significant!
- Set ground rules for meetings – respect the expertise and points of view of all participants.
- Distribute minutes to all partners in a timely fashion, especially those partners who could not attend.



- Offer to conduct an orientation program for partners and their staff. Continue ongoing education about Veterans' needs and issues.
- Face-to-face meetings with a carefully planned agenda are the most effective.

Set Goals

- Invite Veterans who have been identified in your community to tell their stories. This is a major motivator.
- Be sure all partners understand that the approach to comfort-focused end-of-life care for Veterans has psychological and spiritual components that may be unique. Focus on identifying and educating about these needs.
- Set both short and long-term goals.
- Work toward achieving consensus on goals and outcomes for your partnership. Always remember why you are doing this work, and keep the long-term needs of Veterans and their families in mind.
- Be patient!



Tip Sheet 2: Professional Development and Resource Series

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BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE VA MEDICAL CENTERS (VAMCS), VETERANS' SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS (VSOS) AND COMMUNITY BASED OUTPATIENT CLINICS (CBOCS)

Involve the VA from the Beginning

- Invite and encourage the VA and community hospice staff to be active participants in the partnership.
- Identify champions within the state Veteran's Home system, the Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) and the VA Medical Centers (VAMCs).
- Because you will have frequent interaction with case-managers, establish good working relationships with them.
- Ask for contact names of the palliative care staff at the VAMC.

Learn

- Do your homework! Learn as much as possible about VA. Make every effort to understand their work and their challenges. To develop realistic expectations, learn as much as you can about the VA and Veteran groups.
- Learn about health care reimbursement and other benefits for Veterans, including hospice and palliative care.
- Ensure that all partners are informed and knowledgeable about one another's work.
- Assess who knows what! Ask each partner to identify perceived barriers that might impact the success of the partnership.
- Learn about the Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) policies and procedures. Each VISN within the VA network is fairly autonomous.



- Learn about the Veteran enrollment process and how your hospice staff can assist with expedited enrollment for terminally ill Veterans.

Communicate

- Always be respectful of communication patterns with all partners, and don't hesitate to initiate dialogue.
- Encourage all partners to be consistent with messaging.
- Develop and utilize a process for problem-solving when faced with challenging issues.
- Establish relationships with senior leadership of each partner organization. Send them frequent updates.
- Establish regular communication with VA facilities and circulate contact lists to partners and other interested parties.
- Let the VA and other partners know how much their involvement is appreciated!
- Listen carefully to VA language. Note their acronyms and learn to speak their language.
- Understand time commitments and limitations, and focus on manageable tasks.

Participate

- Visit Veterans Service Organizations, like the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and the American Legion, and offer speakers, newsletter articles and/or other resources.
- Learn about and participate in Stand Downs at the VAMC.
- Invite VA staff to visit your hospice program, teach your staff about Veterans' issues, and offer educational programs and resources to them in return.
- Visit the palliative care team and the inpatient area at the VAMC.
- Provide hospice contact lists to VA facilities and clinics.

Evaluate

- Evaluate your present services to Veterans. Enhance the ability of your staff to identify Veteran needs, how to determine what services a Veteran may be receiving and what you can do to expand your services to meet their needs.
- Don't underestimate the importance of celebrating your successes!



Tip Sheet 3: Professional Development and Resource Series

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ENGAGING VETERANS

Your Approach

- Give Veterans an opportunity to tell their stories.
- Respect Veterans' military service, their feelings, and any suggestions they might offer.
- Thank Veterans for their service to our country.
- Show appreciation for the families of Veterans.
- Always be sincere, caring, compassionate and ready and able to listen to what a Veteran or his or her family member has to share about the situation they are dealing with. Be supportive and non-judgmental and always validate their feelings and concerns.
- Be honest, sincere, caring and respectful.
- Accept, without judgment, the Veteran as he/she is.
- It might take longer for some Veterans to trust you. Be patient and listen.
- Expect the Veteran's sharing to occur over a period of time.

Reach Out

- Recognize Veterans at the beginning of meetings. Find opportunities to honor Veterans for their service.
- Consider utilizing technology to reach Veterans (cable television, other media, social networking, and internet).
- Identify hospice staff that are Veterans themselves, and engage them in developing the Hospice-Veterans Partnership.
- Reach out to Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), such as the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Gold Star, etc.



- Be available to provide additional support and/or offer additional resources as necessary.
- Participate in Veteran's Day recognition ceremonies and activities.
- Identify hospice volunteers who are Veterans and involve them in developing outreach to Veterans.
- Presenting a recognition pin, in a small personalized ceremony, can be powerful.
- Veteran volunteers have the enthusiasm and connectivity to do regular outreach and rounding with informal referral sources like Veteran Service Organizations, shelters, and homeless coalitions.

Learn

- Listen to the Veteran's story, and, if possible, ask if you can record it. Validate their experiences and feelings.
- Participate in activities where Veterans are present. Work to establish trust with Veterans. Learn from them!
- Listen carefully to Veterans' beliefs, customs and faith. This will tell you a lot about who they are.
- If a Veteran wants to share their story and expresses emotions, be prepared to give comfort and reassurance. If you have never walked in his/her shoes, don't say, "I know how you feel." unless you have lived a similar experience. Instead, you might say, "It must be (have been) very difficult for you."
- Remember that a homeless Veteran may or may not have chosen to be homeless for a variety of reasons. Don't try to fix the reason. Just listen and try to learn more about the Veteran's story.



Educate

- Be sure program leadership is informed about Veterans' issues.
- Provide appropriate materials to educate Veterans, their family members, and friends about hospice and palliative care services in the community. Explain how those services might meet their needs.
- Reach out to retired Veterans and educate them about reimbursement for end-of-life care and other benefits to which they may be entitled.
- Attend and participate in Stand Downs, Health Fairs, and any other forum that provides an opportunity learn more about Veterans and to share information with them.
- Involve Veterans in your work when possible.
- Be aware of the resources and benefits that are available to Veterans. Assist them in making contact with these resources or accessing their benefits. Accompany them if requested.
- Be a resource partner for the Veterans Service Organizations in your region.

Veterans as Patients

- Using the Military History Checklist or similar tool to guide you, ask all patients about their military service and develop a Veteran-centric care plan to meet their needs.
- During the admission and assessment process, ask the Veteran if their name has changed since their service in the military. This makes locating records much easier, but is not a routine question for most caregivers.
- Pay careful attention to the individual needs and personality of each Veteran. Assign staff and volunteers who can interact effectively.
- Educate staff about the wars and conflicts that Veterans have experienced as well as the benefits to which they may be entitled.
- Encourage staff to listen carefully to a Veteran's positive and negative experiences.
- If mental health issues are a barrier, professional interventions may be needed. Assist the Veteran in getting the resources that they need.